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INFO RUEHAA/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT 3516
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RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 0006
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 0006
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 3741
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 2016
RUEHK/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 0114
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0688
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0875
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0023
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 1674
RUEHVN/USMISSION USOSCE 2169
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C O N F I D E N T I A L TASHKENT 002084

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DEPT FOR SCA/CEN AND DRL

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TAGS: PHUM PGOV PREL UZ

SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST SENTENCED TO THREE YEARS
IMPRISONMENT

REF: A. TASHKENT 1866

¶B. TASHKENT 1843

Classified By: POLOFF R. FITZMAURICE FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (C) Summary: On December 3, the Associated Press reported that Ezgulik human rights activist Karim Bozorboev was sentenced on November 30 for fraud, though it incorrectly reported that he was sentenced to six years imprisonment instead of three. Ezgulik Leader Vasila Inoyatova, the source of the AP article, maintained that the charges against Bozorboev were politically-motivated, and reminded poloff that four other Ezgulik activists are currently held in Uzbek prisons. Inoyatova also reported that Birlik opposition party Deputy Chairman Pulat Akhunov still has not been issued a new passport and was recently prevented from traveling to Tashkent to begin a hunger strike in protest. Inoyatova requested further assistance in paying for legal fees for Bozorboev and the four Ezgulik activists currently in prison, and we are inclined to support her request. End summary.

BOZORBOEV SENTENCED TO THREE YEARS, SIX MONTHS

¶2. (C) On December 3, the Associated Press reported that Karim Bozorboev, the Deputy Chairman of Ezgulik's Syrdarya province branch, was sentenced by a court in Gulistan on November 30 for fraud. Ezgulik Leader Vasila Inoyatova, the source of the AP article, told poloff on December 4 that Bozorboev was sentenced to three years and six months in prison, not six years and three months as reported by AP. Inoyatova maintained that the prosecutors failed to prove the charges against Bozorboev, which she believed were politically-motivated and aimed at thwarting Bozorboev's own investigations of malfeasance by local authorities (Bozorboev had previously investigated two high-profile corruption cases in Syrdarya province). Bozorboev was originally arrested on October 23, one day after 300 market traders staged a public

protest that he tried to mediate (ref A). Inoyatova said that Ezgulik planned to appeal Bozorboev's conviction.

¶3. (C) The Global Human Rights Defenders Fund, via Freedom House, provided 500 dollars to pay for Bozorboev's lawyer. Inoyatova acknowledged receiving the funds from Freedom House, which were given to her deputy, Abdurakhmon Tashanov, during a conference last week in Istanbul. Freedom House has since requested additional money to support Bozorboev's family and to pay for additional legal fees associated with his appeal.

FOUR OTHER EZGULIK MEMBERS CURRENTLY IN PRISON

¶4. (C) Inoyatova noted that four other Ezgulik activists have been convicted of politically-motivated charges in recent years and are currently languishing in Uzbek prisons: Abdurasul Khudaynazarov, Ulugbek Kattabekov, Mukhammadali Karabaev, and Dilmurod Mukhiddinov. Inoyatova said that communication with the imprisoned activists has been limited, and that she did not even know where Kattabekov and Karabaev were being held. She also reported that Karabaev had recently been tortured in prison, suffering two broken arms. In an alternative report presented in November in Geneva to the United Nations Committee Against Torture, Ezgulik stated that more than 50 human rights activists and journalists are currently being held in Uzbek prisons.

REQUEST FOR ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE WITH LAWYERS

¶5. (C) Inoyatova requested the Embassy's assistance in paying for lawyers for the four Ezgulik activists currently in prison. She requested a total of 400 dollars, 100 for each inmate. She said that the lawyers would try to prove that the charges against the inmates were politically-motivated and would publicize their plight in the international media. For the cases of Kattabekov and Karabaev, they also would work with Ministry of Interior Directorate of Prisons (GUIN) officials to determine where the two are being held.

PULATOV STILL WAITING FOR A PASSPORT

¶6. (C) Inoyatova reported that Birlik opposition party Deputy Chairman Pulat Akhunov was still waiting for his passport to be issued by authorities in Andijon. Akhunov, who has resided in exile in Sweden for the past several years, returned to Uzbekistan in March to renew his passport (ref B). In a recent Birlik press release, Akhunov threatened to begin a hunger strike in front of the Presidential Apparatus in protest. But on his way to Tashkent from Andijon on November 30, he was reportedly stopped by authorities on the border of the Pap region of Namangan province and forced to return to Andijon. At an Embassy reception in September, Akhunov told poloff that he was generally free to travel around Uzbekistan, even without a passport. Poloff invited Akhunov to the Embassy's Human Rights Day reception on December 10, and Inoyatova said that Akhunov would try to attend again.

COMMENT

¶7. (C) With more than 50 human rights activists and journalists already in prison, according to Inoyatova's reckoning, Bozorboev's conviction demonstrates that the Uzbek government's campaign against human rights defenders continues unabated. We support providing additional money to Ezgulik through the Global Human Rights Defenders Fund to support Bozorboev's family, as well as to pay for his legal fees and those of the other four Ezgulik activists currently in prison.

HANSON